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SOME RECENT FEATURES IN LIBRARY ARCHITECTURE¹BY CHALMERS HADLEY, *Librarian, Denver Public Library*

Questions of library architecture have been considered by this Association from its organization. It was the theme of discussion at the Naragansett Pier meeting nine years ago. The intervening time since then has been particularly rich in the development of library architecture and the recent literature on the subject includes such valuable publications as "Small library buildings," edited by Miss Cornelia Marvin; "New types of library buildings," by the Wisconsin free library commission; and "How to plan a library building for library work," by C. C. Soule.

The importance of a properly planned building for library work was realized as thoroughly years ago as now, but there have been sweeping changes in our ideas of what constitutes a properly planned building. These have been due to the growing complexity of library work, to its democratization, and to the progress made in artificial lighting. Our ideas have changed also in regard to the architectural impression which a library building should give.

Prior to the Columbian exposition held in Chicago in 1893, our library structures showed the influences of the Gothic, Tudor, Georgian and other architectural styles without particular regard as to whether the style was especially adapted to the type of library, or whether local traditions existed which ought to be considered in planning any library structure.

The superb array of buildings of the Greek type, at the Columbian exposition gave an impetus to that impressive style in this country which has continued with undiminished fervor ever since. It had an unprecedented effect on library archi-

tecture, coming as it did in the early years of that era of new buildings, due to the munificence of Mr. Andrew Carnegie. Through this munificence, library buildings sprang mushroom-like over the land and, mushroom-like, was that object of fervid local pride—the ever present library dome where the heated air was wafted in winter time and from whence dripped the summer showers.

Many of these domes were of stained glass, an expensive item in a building of medium cost, and in others, portraits in glass of familiar authors were placed, behind which were arc lights to be turned on at auspicious times, when from the darkened dome there flashed the portraits of Shakespeare and Booth Tarkington, Milton and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

The last decade has witnessed a wide departure from this stereotyped library building, particularly in those states where public library commissions have been most active. In these states successful efforts have been made in increasing number to provide buildings to meet the particular library needs of the community to be served.

During the last ten years there has appeared also an increasing number of library buildings which architecturally have sought to embody the local traditions of their communities. A larger number of buildings have also been designed to meet the special climatic conditions of their localities. Consequently, along the Atlantic seaboard, buildings of the Georgian type, and in the Middle west, those of an English domestic type, or buildings which in their design show the long, unbroken lines of the low-lying prairies, have appeared in number. In the high plateau region of the Central west, buildings of the North Italian type have become numerous, while in the West and Southwest in particular, library structures are reproducing the dis-

¹ Preliminary remarks in describing slides illustrating such features in the library buildings at Portland, Oregon; St. Louis; Somerville and Springfield, Mass.; Mineral Springs and Ft. Atkinson, Wis.; Elizabeth, N. J.; and two branch library buildings in Denver.

tinctive features of the early Spanish colonial buildings.

Our largest library structures continue to follow the Greek type and so secure the compactness and monumental impressiveness which it affords, but there has been a notable departure from this type in our smaller libraries in favor of a style less expensive than the Greek, less institutional and formal in appearance, and more flexible in design. Whatever the type may be, however, there has been a gratifying decrease in attention to decorative details in our smaller buildings with a corresponding increased effort to secure beauty through structural lines and exquisite proportions.

Of late there has been much discussion as to the comparative cost of library and school building construction with criticism of the greater cost of libraries. Such a comparison is not entirely fair, however, for it must be remembered that usually the library building is the only one of its kind in the community, that its work is broadly social as well as educational, that it must provide for diverse activities within its walls, and that it gives service to the public for twelve hours or more every day in the week and practically every day in the year. Even with fire-proof construction, some of our newer library buildings have been erected at the cost of but twenty-one cents a cubic foot.

Occasionally, during the last few years, libraries have been erected as part of a group arrangement of buildings in cities where civic center plans have been formulated. The architectural beauty so obtained may in the future result unfortunately for libraries in setting restrictions difficult to avoid should the enlargement of the library building become necessary with the growth of its work.

A desire has recently become apparent in some cities and towns to give the branch library, as well as the main building itself, the appearance of a store. To heighten this effect, it has been suggested and actually tried in places, to provide a building similar in appearance to sur-

rounding stores, flush with the sidewalk and with no entrance steps. Many store rooms with good wall space and light are well adapted to library uses, but the deliberate desire to efface all appearance of a library structure and imitate that of a store room is a sad commentary on the American public, as well as one of its most democratic institutions. Probably the alert citizen who appreciates the value of books and is keen to recognize the building which houses them is quite as valuable to the community as the one too indolent to climb the usual half dozen steps at a library entrance.

Some of our newest large buildings reveal the desire to accommodate the numerous civic organizations which wish to meet at the library. One of the most recently completed ones shows three auditoria seating from 100 to 125 persons each and five committee rooms. Such facilities not only accommodate numerous worthy organizations, but they greatly increase the library's influence by reaching many who otherwise might not come to the library building.

Such use of library rooms makes pertinent the question, What restrictions, if any, should a library place on the *character* of meetings held under its roof? It also raises the question as to how far a library in a large city should go as a municipal meeting place without sacrificing its greater value as a library.

In spite of our numerous excursions into the kindergarten and other fields of endeavor, most of them eminently worthy and proper, our principal activity as a public institution remains that of working directly through books. The main reason for providing meeting places for clubs, etc., therefore, is the increased opportunities of supplying books. For that reason I would not provide separate outside entrances to library rooms, but would require every individual of our considerably coddled library public to reach those rooms through the library's entrance and corridors. By doing so, the visitor will be brought into physical contact at least with

the library's main activity as a tax-supported institution, even at the annoyance of increased noise in the building.

Another feature in our newer buildings which is increasingly noted is that of placing book stacks in the center of the building rather than against one of the exterior walls, usually the rear one. This former arrangement resulted from the expense and insufficiency of artificial light in the stacks, and natural light was poured into the room at the cost of depriving readers and staff of one-fourth of the light and fresh air that should have been theirs.

In the older arrangement, many plans were used to catch the last lingering ray for the stacks, even to lining opposite walls and courts with enameled tiles or by painting them white for purposes of better reflection. In addition to the objection of giving the books, rather than readers, outside light and air, this arrangement had other disadvantages. Natural light in most cities is an uncertain source for libraries, direct sunlight frequently causes deterioration to book bindings and paper, and the placing of stacks against an outside wall prevents easy accessibility to them from the other three-fourths of the library building.

The substitution of tungsten for carbon lamps, and now nitrogen for the tungsten, has increased the intensity of artificial light over four-fold, with but little, if any, increase in expense. Hence, natural light is no longer so indispensable to book stacks as it once was.

By placing the stacks in the building's center, the least valuable part of the library structure, a step is taken for greater and more uniform accessibility. One of our most experienced librarians is not content with this, however, but believes that a vertical stack, even in the library's center, will not be the final arrangement for accessibility, but that the various floors should be so reinforced that one or two tiers of stacks could be placed on every floor in the exact location where the books on that particular floor will be most easily reached.

Another feature in our newer buildings is more definite provision for the greater comfort and well-being of the staff. It was Mr. Hitt of Washington, I believe, who stated that in the success or failure of a library's work, the building itself contributed five per cent; the book collection, twenty per cent, and the librarian and staff, seventy-five per cent. It is wisdom to see that proper facilities for the well-being of such a contributing force be provided, and rest and recreation rooms for staff members are becoming usual.

A notable development in library planning, especially in smaller cities and towns, is shown in the attempt to make the library building a social center, or to make its activities an integral part of a social center scheme. What is most needed in many small communities is not a library alone, so much as a library in connection with recreation rooms, a public auditorium, rest rooms and, if a separate wing to the building be possible, a gymnasium. I believe that frequently much of the enthusiasm for a public library in a small town is based on a more or less unconscious desire for a social center. It is folly for libraries in medium-sized and larger cities to attempt social activities which can be handled better by other institutions, but new library buildings in several small cities show interesting attempts to make the library building a physical part of a community center. Some possible loss of identity to the library in such a scheme will be more than compensated for by bringing the various forces for community betterment into more active co-operation and by decreasing their individual cost of maintenance.

Some of our older library buildings are said to have forty and fifty per cent of floor space devoted to entrance halls, stairways, corridors, permanent wall space, etc. It is noticeable in our newer buildings, both large and small, that space for such uses has been greatly decreased. One of the radical changes in decreasing this waste has been the frequent elimination, when possible, of permanent walls.

Such a radical change as this can not be made in the larger so well as in smaller buildings, but usually it is found that many permanent walls are not only dispensable, but their replacement by floor cases as dividing lines is a decided improvement. It is always difficult, in planning a library structure, to forecast absolutely the spaces needed for the library's various activities. Wherever floor cases can be used in place of permanent walls to mark these divisions, not only will greater flexibility result, but a spacious, open interior will be obtained, with increased light and air.

While numerous radical changes in library planning have been general during the last decade, this is true particularly in our smaller buildings. One reason is, there was much to improve, for as a class, library buildings in our smaller cities and towns did not represent the thought and ability displayed in the larger buildings.

One change which has been noted particularly in our smaller buildings has been that in the shape of the building itself. Many of the older buildings were slightly oblong, others were square, or if the building lot were narrow, the building's depth was greater than its frontage.

Another favorite plan was known as the "butterfly" type, with a central delivery room flanked to the right and left by reading rooms for adults and children, and with floor cases for books back of the delivery desk.

Such a plan had certain merits in a medium-sized building, but its defects were glaring in a small library with but one library employee, or two at most.

Consequently, as a result of experience and intelligent observation, we seem to be reaching a more uniform floor plan for small libraries, which shows a simplification in the interior arrangement and a lengthening of the building's frontage at the expense of its depth.

By increasing the length of a small building, several advantages result. Instead of depending on end windows, which frequently abut on adjoining property not controlled by the library, an unflin-

source of natural light will be secured through the increased window space made possible by the longer front and rear walls. By this lengthening, a greater separation of rooms for adult and juvenile readers will be possible, with added quietness in both. Another advantage will be to bring the delivery desk forward so it need not be more than fifteen feet from the building's entrance.

Most of our better small buildings also show, when possible, an open interior with a substitution of floor cases for permanent walls; the abolition of a librarian's room from the main floor, in buildings costing less than \$10,000; and the abandonment of a separate book or stack room until the capacity of all wall and floor cases is exhausted.

A building somewhat in the way of an innovation, which offers excellent advantages to a small branch building, or a village library, is, for want of a better term, described as having a "broken" floor plan. By this is meant two wings of equal length, adult and juvenile reading rooms, joining at right angles like the letter "L."

Such a building, placed at street intersections, provides an entrance at the street corner, with a walk to the library's entrance, which will be on the inside angle of the building. Directly opposite the entrance will be the delivery desk. At this point, midway between the two wings, the library attendant will have excellent supervision of both reading rooms. The "break" in the floor plan also gives excellent separation of the two reading rooms without the need of dividing partitions. If a librarian's room is to be located on the main floor, it would be built directly back of the delivery desk.

Most librarians and trustees have gone through the unpleasant experience of trying to locate a proposed building when citizens on two rival streets were in arms as to which thoroughfare the new building should face. By using this type of building, with an entrance at the street intersection, both factions will be appeased and a most excellent library building plan will be secured.